REDEEMING THE MAINE COAST

BY ALFRED ELDEN

Mr. MacDonald and his Sunbeam crew.

MANY hundred thousand summer tourists from all parts of the country have reveled in the beauties of the Maine seacoast. They know the luxuriousness of its fashionable hotels, the pleasures of its cottage life, and the next-to-nature benefits of a few weeks in its spruce-scented camps.

These "resorters" have enjoyed to the utmost the bathing, the boating, the calm and the storm, of the Atlantic. Diversion and profit have been theirs through intercourse with the kindly people of towns, villages, and hamlets. Vacationists have snapshotted the sun-bronzed fishermen; artists have transferred to canvas, with the accuracy of their varying abilities, the beetling cliffs and dark-browed promontories; poets have sung their songs of the salty sea, inspired by scenic surroundings to be found nowhere else.

That is one side of the Maine coast and its people, the bright, healthy, normal side. There is another, a darker, seamy side. No man knows that better than the Rev. Alexander P. MacDonald, the "Coast Missionary." Since 1900 he has been laboring in what is undoubtedly the largest and one of the worst parishes in the United States. His parishioners are the simple natives living in the little known sections, on the "outside" islands, or the remote parts of the "main." These are the folk, theirs is the life, that summer tourists neither see nor hear of.

Scattered over the entirety of the Maine coast are fifteen thousand to twenty thousand "natives" who live in isolation. Contented with little, asking for few of the comforts the world has to offer because they know not of them, men and women live and die. Although on many of the islands the soil is arable, the native male seldom raises enough green stuff for the use even of his own family. The women cook, take care of their children, and drudge from early morning until night.

Families are large. These fisher folk think nothing of raising from six to twelve or fourteen boys and girls. There are no physicians to be had unless they are transported from the mainland, which takes time and costs money. Then too, a great majority of these localities are inaccessible to civilization for long periods, particularly when the storms of winter howl over sea and shore and beat the waves to fury.

In some of the thickly populated communities—thickly populated by comparison only, as the most prosperous island settlements seldom number more than 100-odd souls—some motherly woman with sympathetic heart, crudely, unhygienically, with no understanding save the God-given desire inherent in most of her sex to alleviate suffering, performs the functions of midwife when the little ones come. In many cases physical deformities are engendered, resulting in life-long miseries, which might have been avoided had there been intelligent care.

These natives know little or nothing of how to promote their physical well being. Despite the pure air, there is a good deal of consumption among them. They eat too much fish and cream of tartar bread, and too little meat, fresh vegetables, and fruit. The smackmen who buy their fish and lobsters as they cruise up and down the coast are a curse to these simple people; for they bring to the men the cheapest quality of fiery liquor, and after plying them with it drive bargains to their own advantage. Frequently a quart of rum will buy more fish than will a ten-dollar bill.

On the hundreds of islands between Little Machias Bay and Pemaquid Point live approximately six thousand people. On some of the more remote are to be found old men and women who literally have never strayed from their own firesides. It is a widely scattered community, living within a stone's throw of all that goes to make life dear to most of us, as effectively marooned from civilization as if they herded in the South Seas.

IT was to this field of labor that Mr. MacDonald came in 1900. Ever since then the Coast Missionary and his assistants have unflaggingly carried onward as noble and self-sacrificing home missionary work as can be found in the United States.

It is the modern motorboat that has made possible this stupendous task of reclaiming these ignorantly wayward folk of the Maine seacoast, and the square-shouldered parson is as good a boat pilot as he is sky pilot.

Mr. MacDonald is an ordained Congregational minister. He was graduated from the Farmington Normal School, Coburn Classical Institute, Bowdoin College, and Andover Theological Seminary. He served an apprenticeship in mission work in South Dakota and the State of Washington. Returning to Maine in 1900, he settled at Bar Harbor.

Mr. MacDonald has a brother who is also a minister, who at that time preached to the wealthy and fashionable summer congregations at Bar Harbor. One day this brother asked the Coast Missionary to supply for him. So impressive were the young clergyman's remarks in a heartfelt plea for the people he had come to know and love that Bishop Alexander Mackay-Smith of Philadelphia gave him his private yacht Morning Star that he might more easily reach the out-of-the-way sections.

While the Morning Star proved a fine summer boat, it was not suitable for battling with the winter moods of the Atlantic off the coast of Maine; so was hauled out on shore from December until April. During this time MacDonald had to make his way from place to place as best he could,—by boat, by train, by stage, even by foot. Means of communication in winter are so meager that it took three days to reach islands that in the warm months were within a two hours' steamboat ride from Bar Harbor.

It was for these reasons that Mrs. John S. Kennedy of New York furnished seven thousand dollars to build and equip a suitable boat for all-the-year work, and it was early in 1912 that the beautiful Sunbeam was launched. By the following February it had covered nearly ten thousand miles of coastal waters, and the mileage for 1913 was nearly double this.

Mr. MacDonald visits more than half a hundred settlements that have absolutely no other pastoral supervision. He systematically holds services, establishes and sustains Sunday school classes, cares for the sick, keeps an oversight in the schools (where there are any), encourages boys and girls to save, and generally ministers to the moral, spiritual, and sometimes the physical needs of these untutored children of nature.

Among these people he is both feared and loved,—feared for the truths that hurt, the truths no offender likes to hear; loved for his unselfish devotion to his parishioners, for his patience with their follies, for his tenderness with the sick or the infirm. Invariably it is the Coast Missionary who is sent for to arbitrate business differences, to settle family disputes, to console in the time of illness or death.

"Somehow, the parson allus makes you feel to hum," said old Bill Wade of Swan Island. "He sartinly can spout the Gospel; but he can run a gas engine too, 'n' steer a compass course, by gorry!"

ONE August Sunday the Rev. Hannah J. Powell, an ordained woman minister, Mr. MacDonald's most efficient assistant and cowofker, preached without notes a sermon at Eagle Island in East Penobscot Bay. Then she called on Granny Quinn, whose age and infirmities kept her at home.

"Read me thet air sarmon," peremptorily demanded Granny.

"But I haven't written it out, Granny," explained Miss Powell.

"Then you'll hev to tell it to me," insisted the old woman.

And with patient devotion to her work the "female preacher" recapitulated its principal points as accurately as she could.

Granny Roberts, seventy years old, of Bois Beubert Island, near Millbridge, also infirm, was carried by kindly hands to the cabin of the Sunbeam to attend communion service. She had never in her long life heard of, much less seen administered, the sacraments of the Christian church.

A school class at Outer Long Island.

UNCLE ALEC ALLEY of Head Harbor Island is but one of many Maine Coast characters. He can neither read nor write, and he wears rings in his ears; yet he is a splendid pilot, and visiting yachtsmen frequently enlist his services. A compass might as well be a squash so far as its presence benefits Uncle Alec; but he can take a boat through the thickest fog that ever blew off the Grand Banks and bring it up within a stone's toss of where he plans.

A few seasons ago when President Taft was making a trip from New York to Bar Harbor on the yacht Mayflower, one of those impenetrable New England coast fogs shut in. A man needs something more than a general master's license to navigate the dangerous channels of Eastern Maine in thick weather with the President of the United States on board; so the Mayflower's skipper wisely brought his craft to anchor at Head Harbor Island. All that night the easterly swell surged in and rudely tossed the Mayflower and President Taft as tirelessly, as disrespectfully, as it might have tossed the Bonnie Belle and its crew of husky Swan Island fishermen.

Uncle Alec Alley was extremely solicitous the next morning. "Waal, waal, now! Ain't thet a shame? Thet ya't's been layin' thar all night long with the President aboard—'n' the poor big critter, the poor big critter! I'll bet he's been sicker'n a hoss. Now, if they'd only come to me I could taken 'em all in to Bar Habber a flyin'. The poor big critter!"

Uncle Alec calls every female "Deary" on general principles. It means no more than when he addresses

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The Sunbeam leaving Portland on a missionary tour.